Should I Take This Distance Learning Course?
A Consumer Guide for Distance Learning Courses

Was the course tested with the public health audience?
√ Does it address public health competencies?
√ Who approved the course content for the public health audience?   Was the course designed by subject matter experts in public health?   Are they credentialed?
√ Who sponsored the course?   Who paid for its development?   Is the review committee listed?   What are the credentials of the design team?
√ Who tested its usability?   Does your peer group like it?   Does the course accommodate the variety of student backgrounds in public health?
√ How was the course pilot conducted and evaluated?   What audience completed the pilot evaluation? How large was the audience?

Are the goals and learning outcomes clearly stated?
√ Does the course description explain active learning procedures and student deliverables in this course? See if the course was designed so you can actively gather information rather than having it given to you. Does it allow you to choose from various options to navigate the range of content strategies, sequence, pace of instruction, and feedback?   Does it help you decide what's important?

Are pre-class preparation materials provided?
√ Do they provide pre-class study questions and study guides and other advance organizers to encourage thinking and informed participation?   Your success in distance learning depends on preparing in advance and bringing your experience to the class.
√ The length of the course and the suggested timelines related to the content should be described.

Does the course description state the format and frequency for instructor/student and student/student interaction?
√ Make sure the type of interaction matches your learning style or preferences. Some people don't need a lot of interaction while others thrive on it.
√ Do the course providers provide good technical assistance for using the medium through which the course is delivered?   Test the assistance to see if really exists, a real person, not a machine. Make sure a phone number is posted.

Is a demo or sample of the course available for previewing?
√ There should always be information about how to use the module and suggestions for alternative uses. It should give information on the suggested activities to accompany the course.   It should tell you where to find supplementary materials.
√ Go through a sample and see if you like the format.   See if it is user friendly and works on your particular computer. See if there are any software glitches.   If there are, this is a BIG clue that the product was never tested either internally or externally.   Stay away from it.

What is the date on the course?
√ When was it last revised?
√ Who monitors the course and how often?   Is the certificate of completion awarded quickly?